
The Way and The Path: A Comparative Study of Cosmological, Ethical, and Mystical Discourses in the I-Ching and the Quran

Synchronicity versus Divine Providence

Author: Dr. Mustafa Kizililsoley

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<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8936-1331>

Introduction

The Problem of Comparison

At the heart of this dissertation lies the fundamental challenge and necessity of comparing two of the most influential texts in human history: China's *I-Ching* (Book of Changes) and the sacred book of Islam, the *Quran*. At first glance, these two texts appear irreducibly different in their origins, structures, and purposes. The *I-Ching* emerged as an ancient system of divination, evolving over time into a philosophical classic—a layered and evolutionary document.¹ In contrast, the *Quran* is a direct and verbal revelation (*Wahy*), believed to have come from a single divine source within a specific historical context.⁴ This study argues that despite these fundamental differences, a comparison is not only possible but essential to illuminate the archetypal ways humanity has sought to comprehend its place in the cosmos. The thesis posits that one text represents a quest for wisdom through the *observation of cosmic patterns*, while the other represents the reception of wisdom through *divine address*. Beyond their surface dissimilarities, these two approaches exhibit surprising structural and philosophical parallels in their answers to the fundamental questions of existence.

Historical Contextualization

Every text is a product of its historical and cultural matrix, and understanding this context is crucial for deciphering the deep structure of the texts.

The World of the *I-Ching*: The origins of the *I-Ching* date back to China's Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046-256 BCE).⁶ This period witnessed a transition from the turtle shells and ox bones used for divination by the Shang Dynasty to a more systematic divinatory text known as the *Zhou Yi* (Changes of Zhou).⁸ The text took its present form and gained philosophical depth with the later addition of commentaries known as the "Ten Wings" (*Shi Yi*), which are traditionally attributed to Confucius.¹ These additions transformed the *I-Ching* from a divination manual into a philosophical classic that explains the workings of the universe, morality, and human nature. This historical evolution underscores the text's layered, organic, and interpretive nature.

The World of the *Quran*: The *Quran* was revealed in the socio-political and religious atmosphere of 7th-century Arabia. During this period, the Arabian Peninsula was a tribal society situated at the crossroads of great empires (Byzantium and Sassanids), characterized by a fragmented social structure.⁹ In this geography, where different beliefs such as paganism, Christianity, and Judaism coexisted, the message of the *Quran* emerged as a radical monotheism (*Tawhid*) and a moral call against existing social injustices. Unlike the *I-Ching*, the text of the *Quran* was completed over a twenty-three-year prophetic period and is believed to have been sent down by a single divine source, possessing a cohesive and closed structure.

Methodology and Sources

This study adopts a comparative methodology that combines thematic, conceptual, and symbolic analysis. The aim is to move beyond superficial similarities to uncover the underlying thought structures, worldviews, and approaches to the human condition in both texts. The analysis aims to reflect the nuances of the original languages and the richness of their interpretive traditions, based on carefully selected translations and commentaries. For the *I-Ching*, the foundational translations of Richard Wilhelm, James Legge, and Thomas Cleary will be used.¹¹ These translations are critical for capturing both the philosophical depth (Wilhelm) and the more literal meanings (Legge) of the text. For the *Quran*, the translations and commentaries (*tafsir*) of Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır, Arthur J. Arberry, Muhammad Asad, Gazi Özdemir, and Ahmed Hulusi will be the basis.¹⁴ This selection represents different interpretive traditions—traditional (Elmalılı), literary (Arberry), rationalist (Asad), modernist (Özdemir), and mystical/esoteric (Hulusi)—aiming to reflect the richness of the *Quran*'s layers of meaning.

Thesis Statement

Despite their respective origins as an impersonal oracle and a personal revelation, the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* exhibit profound structural parallels in their use of cosmology to ground ethics. However, their fundamental divergence on the nature of the Ultimate Reality (an impersonal Process versus a personal God) creates two distinct models of human perfection: one based on *harmonious alignment* with the cosmic flow, and the other on *willed submission* to divine command. This thesis aims to explore this fundamental duality across the axes of cosmology, ethics, fate, and symbolism, thereby offering a new ground for dialogue between two of humanity's great traditions of seeking meaning.

Part I: The Fabric of Reality: Comparative Cosmology and Metaphysics

This part will comparatively examine how the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* conceive of the universe, define the fundamental principles of reality, and explain the nature of the Ultimate Being. The cosmological and metaphysical frameworks of these two texts form the foundation of their ethical and mystical systems. On one side, there is an organic, process-oriented universe; on the other, a willed, created universe.

Chapter 1: The Universe of Process versus The Universe of Creation

The most fundamental difference between the cosmological views of the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* lies in the reason for the universe's existence and its operational mechanism. The *I-Ching* presents the universe as a spontaneously operating, dynamic process, whereas the *Quran* defines the universe as the product of a conscious will.

The Cosmos of the I-Ching: The Great Flow (Tao)

The cosmology of the *I-Ching* is built upon a system of perpetual and dynamic change. This universe is not in a linear timeline with a beginning and an end, but rather in a cyclical and rhythmic flow.

The Tao as the Ineffable Way: At the philosophical core of the *I-Ching* lies the *Tao*, which is not a creator-god but the underlying principle of the universe; the natural, spontaneous, and harmonious flow of all things.¹⁸ The *Tao*, as the "Way of Nature," operates through the laws of change. As stated in James Legge's translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, it is "like the emptiness of a vessel"; it encompasses everything but is not a "thing" itself.²⁰ This emphasizes its impersonal, process-oriented nature. It is not a being to be worshipped, but a process to be harmonized with.

Yin and Yang: The Engine of Change: This cosmic process is governed by two complementary

and interacting forces: *Yin* (receptive, dark, feminine, passive) and *Yang* (creative, light, masculine, active).⁸ These forces are not a moral opposition like good and evil, but the fundamental polarities necessary for the universe to function. All phenomena, including the 64 hexagrams themselves, are manifestations of the dynamic balance of these two forces.²³ The combination of broken (*Yin*) and solid (*Yang*) lines in a hexagram symbolizes the state of cosmic forces at a particular moment.

The "Ten Wings" and Cosmological Elaboration: The "Ten Wings" commentaries, later added to the core divinatory text of the *I-Ching*, transformed it into a philosophical cosmology. The wing known as the *Dazhuan* (Great Commentary), in particular, describes the *I-Ching* as a microcosm of the universe and explains the processes of change in symbolic language.¹ According to this commentary, the eight trigrams emerge from the "eternal oneness" (*Taiji* or the Supreme Ultimate) through a three-stage bifurcation: Oneness gives birth to the duality of *Yin* and *Yang*; this duality produces the Four Images (Major *Yang*, Minor *Yang*, Major *Yin*, Minor *Yin*), which in turn generate the eight trigrams.¹ This process occurs not by the command of a will, but organically and spontaneously.

The Cosmos of the Quran: The Willed Creation (Khalq)

The cosmology of the *Quran* is radically different from the process-oriented model of the *I-Ching*. The universe is not a self-existing system or one that operates with an internal dynamic, but the result of the conscious and willed act of a single, absolute Creator.

Tawhid as the Foundation: The principle of *Tawhid*, the absolute foundation of Islamic belief, expresses the oneness, uniqueness, and sovereignty of Allah.²⁶ This principle means that the universe was brought into existence from a single source, by a single will. Creation is an instantaneous and deliberate act that occurs with the command "Be!" (*Kun*). This implies that the universe has no existence independent of Allah and is completely subject to His will.

Creation in Six "Yum" (Periods): The *Quran* states that the heavens, the earth, and all that is between them were created in "six days".²⁷ Modern commentaries emphasize that the Arabic word "yum" used here does not refer to a 24-hour day but to a long period of time, an era, or an eon. This interpretation aligns the *Quranic* account of creation with the modern scientific understanding of the universe. Although commentaries offer different interpretations on details such as whether the heavens or the earth were created first²⁸, the fundamental idea is that creation is a gradual and orderly process, but one that proceeds within a divine plan.

A Universe of Signs (Ayat): According to the *Quran*, the created world is not just a physical space but an infinite collection of signs (*ayat*) pointing back to its Creator. Natural phenomena, such as the alternation of night and day, the orbits of the sun and moon, and the rain that revives the earth, are presented as proofs of Allah's power, knowledge, and mercy. Nature is a divine book to be read and contemplated.

The fundamental distinction between these two cosmological models lies in the concept of *agency*. The universe of the *I-Ching* is a process without a processor, a verb without a subject. The workings of the universe are described in impersonal, process-oriented terms like "flow," "change," and "interaction".¹⁸ The process of bifurcation from unity described in the *Dazhuan*

is an emergent property, not a commanded action.¹ In contrast, the universe of the *Quran* is the direct product of a subject—a conscious, willing, and personal God. The *Quran* uses verbs of direct action: *khalafa* (He created), *ja'ala* (He made), *sawwa* (He fashioned).²⁹ The universe is commanded to exist.³⁰ This fundamental difference in agency determines the nature of the human relationship with the cosmos. In the *I-Ching*, the goal is to *understand and align with* the pre-existing, impersonal process. In the *Quran*, the goal is to *recognize and submit to* the personal Creator who stands outside and above the process. This sets the stage for the contrast between the Sage and the Believer, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ahmed Hulusi's insight—that the 'seven heavens' in the *Quran* can be read as 'seven levels of consciousness'—strikingly parallels the *I Ching*'s esoteric concept of Heaven symbolizing the mind/spirit, while Earth represents the body/form.

Chapter 2: The Nature of the Ultimate: Tian/Tao and Allah

The question of how the universe operates inevitably leads to the question of what the Ultimate Being or principle behind the universe is. The *I-Ching* and the *Quran* diverge radically in their answers to this question. The Ultimate Being of the *I-Ching* is an impersonal principle, while that of the *Quran* is an all-powerful personal God.

The Impersonal Ultimate of the I-Ching

In the philosophical layers of the *I-Ching*, the Ultimate Being is expressed through two main concepts: *Tian* (Heaven) and *Tao* (the Way). These concepts have intertwined and influenced each other over time.

Tian (Heaven): In the early layers of the text, *Tian* appears as a quasi-personal force that oversees a moral order and grants a mandate to rule (*Ming*). Richard Wilhelm's translation of Hexagram 1, *Ch'ien* (The Creative), illustrates the complexity of this concept. Wilhelm interprets the hexagram as both "the strong, creative action of the Deity" and "the way of the universe".¹¹ This shows that *Tian* was understood as both a power with a will and a universal law. However, over time, especially under the influence of Taoist philosophy, this personal aspect of *Tian* weakened and it evolved into a more abstract principle.

Tao (The Way): In the later philosophical interpretations of the *I-Ching* and especially in Taoism, the ultimate principle crystallizes as the *Tao*. The *Tao* is an ineffable, amoral, and impersonal reality that is the source and pattern of all things.¹⁹ It is not a being, but a way of being. As stated in James Legge's translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Tao* is "like the emptiness of a vessel," and "Heaven and Earth are not benevolent; they treat all things as straw dogs".²⁰ This shows that the *Tao* is a neutral principle beyond human-centered moral categories. It is not worshipped; one lives in harmony with it.

The Personal God of the Quran

The *Quranic* conception of God stands in stark contrast to the impersonal ultimate principle of the *I-Ching*. The God of the *Quran*, Allah, is a personal, willful being in a continuous relationship with the universe.

Allah: The One and Only (Ahad, Wahid): The principle of *Tawhid*, the central pillar of Islam, emphasizes the absolute oneness of Allah.²⁶ This is not just a numerical oneness but also His uniqueness, incomparability, and transcendence over all creation (*tanzih*). He is the creator of all things and resembles nothing created.

Asma-ul-Husna (The Most Beautiful Names): In the *Quran*, Allah is known not through His essence (*Dhat*) but through His attributes and names. "The Most Beautiful Names" (*Asma-ul-Husna*), such as Ar-Rahman (The Most Merciful), Al-'Adl (The Utterly Just), Al-Khaliq (The Creator), and Al-'Alim (The All-Knowing), reveal His nature as both transcendent (beyond creation) and immanent (active within creation). Sufi commentators like Ahmed Hulusi interpret these names not just as attributes but as cosmic forces that constitute and govern the universe, adding an esoteric dimension to them.³¹ Rationalist commentators like Muhammad Asad use these names to emphasize the rational and moral aspects of Allah's relationship with the universe.³³

A God Who Relates: Unlike the *Tao*, Allah is a God who speaks, commands, loves, gets angry, and judges. The relationship between human and Allah is not that of a part harmonizing with the whole, but of a servant (*'abd*) submitting to and worshipping his Lord (*Rabb*). This relationship is constantly kept alive through prayer, worship, and revelation.

These different natures of the Ultimate Being directly determine the understanding of morality and ethics in each system. Since the *Tao* is an impersonal and amoral process, concepts like "good" and "evil" are not absolute divine commands but human interpretations of states of harmony (*shun*) or disharmony (*ni*) with this process. Misfortune or disaster is not a moral punishment but a natural consequence of going against the flow of the *Tao*.³⁵ On the other hand, since Allah is a personal and moral God, He defines good and evil through revelation. Therefore, morality is not a matter of cosmic harmony but of obedience to divine law (*Shari'ah*). Misfortune can be a test, a punishment for sin, or a natural consequence, but it always has a place within a framework of divine will and justice. This leads to two different ethical projects: The *Jūnzī* (Superior Person) seeks wisdom to *discern* the flow of the *Tao*. The *Mūmin* (Believer) seeks guidance to *obey* the command of Allah. The former is an act of perception and alignment, while the latter is an act of hearing and submission.

The following table summarizes the fundamental cosmological and metaphysical concepts of these two systems.

Table 1: Comparative Cosmological and Metaphysical Concepts

Concept	I-Ching	Quran	Core Divergence
Ultimate Reality	<i>Tao</i> (The Way): An impersonal, ineffable, spontaneously operating process.	Allah: A personal, single, willful, omnipotent God.	Agency: Process vs. Agent.
Nature of Universe	Process: An organic whole in constant change through the dynamic interaction of <i>Yin</i> and <i>Yang</i> .	Creation (<i>Khalq</i>): A regulated system consciously created by Allah's command, "Be!".	Origin: Spontaneous existence vs. Willed creation.
Conception of Time	Cyclical: An endless cycle of change and return, like the seasons or day and night.	Linear: A linear history with a beginning (creation) and a definitive end (the Day of Judgment).	Teleology: Continuous cycle vs. Final purpose.
Source of Agency	Impersonal: The movement of the universe is intrinsic; it is not dependent on an external will.	Personal: The universe moves by the will and command of Allah and is subject to Him.	Authority: Intrinsic law vs. External command.
Source of Order	Natural Law: The order of the universe arises from the natural and spontaneous laws of the <i>Tao</i> .	Divine Command: The order of the universe depends on the laws established by Allah and His continuous oversight.	Governance: Autonomous system vs. Theonomic control.

Part II: The Human Ideal: Cultivation and Submission

Following the cosmological and metaphysical foundations, this part examines the ideal human models presented by the *I-Ching* and the *Quran*. Both texts offer a roadmap for human self-transcendence and perfection, but the nature and goals of these paths are as different as the worldviews they are based on. The *I-Ching* idealizes the "Superior Person" (*Jūnzǐ*), who cultivates himself to achieve universal harmony, while the *Quran* centers on the "Believer" (*Mūmin*) and the "Perfect Human" (*Insan-ı Kâmil*), who realizes himself through submission to the divine will.

Chapter 3: The Archetype of the Perfected Individual

Both traditions present an archetype of a morally and spiritually developed individual who transcends the ordinary person. These archetypes embody the ultimate values of each system and the potential that humanity is meant to achieve.

The *Jūnzǐ* and *Shengren* of the I-Ching

At the center of the ethical vision of the *I-Ching* is the figure of the *Jūnzǐ* (君子), the "Superior Person" or "Gentleman." This is not a status of noble birth but one acquired through moral cultivation and wisdom.³⁷ The *Jūnzǐ* is the person who has the ability to act correctly and appropriately in the ever-changing flow of the universe. He "reduces that which is too much and augments that which is too little," thus providing balance and harmony.³⁸ His goal is to transcend personal interests and align his actions with the cosmic order. This requires developing a deep intuition and understanding of situations, minimizing conflict, and maximizing success.²⁵

The even more developed and rare form of the *Jūnzǐ* is the *Shengren* (聖人), the "Sage." The *Shengren* has become so integrated with the *Tao* that right action has become natural and effortless for him (*wu-wei*).³⁹ He no longer follows the flow of the universe by thinking; he himself has become a part of that flow. This is the highest point of human potential; a state of being where the individual is in perfect harmony with the universe.

The *Mūmin* and *Insan-ı Kâmil* of the Quran

The ideal human model of the *Quran* is the *Mūmin* (مؤمن), the "Believer." The *Mūmin* is one who has unshakable faith (*iman*) in Allah and His revelation and organizes his life according to the requirements of this faith. The characteristics of an ideal *Mūmin* are frequently mentioned in the *Quran*: humility (*khushu'*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), justice (*'adl*), and complete trust in Allah (*tawakkul*). The perfection of the *Mūmin* comes not from polishing his own virtues, but from his complete submission to the commands of Allah.

In Islamic thought, especially in the Sufi tradition, the pinnacle of this ideal is expressed with the concept of *Insan-ı Kâmil* (انسان کامل), the "Perfect Human." The *Insan-ı Kâmil* is a person who has become a perfect reflection of the divine names and attributes (*Asma-ul-Husna*), a mirror in which they are manifested.⁴⁰ He is a summary of the universe, a microcosm (*kevn-i câmi'*). The person who reaches this station attains the state of being with God (*baqa billah*) by annihilating his own self in God (*fana fillah*). The most perfect example of this station is Prophet Muhammad, and the friends of God (*awliya*) are considered his spiritual inheritors.⁴⁰ The *Insan-ı Kâmil* is a person who has been adorned with divine morals not by his own power, but through absolute submission.

A comparison of these two archetypes reveals a fundamental distinction between *self-realization through autonomy* and *self-realization through theonomy* (submission to divine law). The *Jūnzǐ* perfects himself by studying the cosmic patterns (the hexagrams) and

cultivating his character to match them. The authority for his actions comes from his own cultivated wisdom and insight into the *Tao*. This is an autonomous ethical project. In contrast, the *Mūmin* perfects himself by submitting to the divine commands revealed in the *Quran*. The authority for his actions is external: the will of God. This is a theonomic ethical project. The concept of the *Insan-ı Kâmil* seems to bridge this duality. He becomes a "caliph" (vicegerent of God on Earth) who acts with divine authority, but only after having completely surrendered his own will.⁴⁰ This presents a paradox: ultimate spiritual authority is gained through ultimate surrender. This situation differs from the *Shengren*, whose authority is gained through ultimate self-cultivation and understanding.

Chapter 4: A Comparative Study of Core Virtues

Ideal human models are embodied through certain core virtues. The *I-Ching* and the *Quran* emphasize seemingly similar virtues such as humility and truthfulness. However, the underlying logic and the ultimate purpose these virtues serve differ according to the fundamental philosophies of the two systems.

Humility: *Ch'ien* (Hexagram 15) versus *Khushu'*

Ch'ien (Modesty): Hexagram 15 in the *I-Ching*, *Ch'ien* (謙), or "Modesty," demonstrates the central importance of this virtue. This hexagram is formed by the trigram for Earth (receptivity, lowness) above the trigram for Mountain (stillness, height).³⁸ This symbolizes that true greatness lies in modesty, as height (the mountain) is hidden within lowness (the earth). According to the text, modesty "creates success" and allows the "superior man to carry things through".³⁸ Here, humility is not so much a moral command as a strategic virtue necessary for harmonizing with the flow of the universe and ensuring long-term success. The changing lines of the hexagram offer practical advice on how to apply modesty in various situations and state that when applied correctly, it will bring "good fortune".⁴²

Khushu' (Humility) and *Kibr* (Arrogance): In the *Quran*, humility is the fundamental posture of the human being before Allah. Arrogance (*kibr*) is presented as the first and greatest sin, which caused Iblis (Satan) to rebel by saying, "I am better than him" (Al-A'raf 7:12).⁴⁴ Arrogance is to reject the truth and to deny one's creaturely status before God; therefore, it is a barrier to entering Paradise.⁴⁵ Humility, on the other hand, is a quality of the "servants of the Most Merciful"; they "walk on the earth with humility (*hawnan*)" and respond to the provocations of the ignorant with "peace" (Al-Furqan 25:63).⁴⁷ The humility here is not a tool for strategic gain, but an expression of the natural and necessary state of the servant in the face of divine majesty.

Truthfulness: *Cheng* versus *Sidq*

Cheng (Sincerity/Integrity): In the *I-Ching* and its associated Taoist thought, *cheng* (誠), or sincerity/honesty, means to be true to one's own nature and, by extension, to the *Tao*. It is an

authentic state of being, free from artificiality and hypocrisy.⁵² As stated in the fourth line of Hexagram 9, "If you are sincere, blood vanishes and fear gives way".⁵³ Sincerity allows for a clear connection to the cosmic flow and establishes trust in interpersonal relationships.⁵⁴

Sidq (Truthfulness): In the *Quran*, truthfulness (*sidq*) is a divine command: "O you who have believed, fear Allah and be with the truthful" (At-Tawbah 9:119).⁵⁵

Sidq is the most fundamental quality of the prophets; Prophet Abraham was "a man of truth, a prophet" (Maryam 19:41).⁵⁷ Truthfulness encompasses not only speech but also fidelity in thought, intention, action, and covenant. It is emphasized that on the Day of Judgment, "their truthfulness will profit the truthful" (Al-Ma'idah 5:119), highlighting that this virtue has an ultimate and eternal reward.⁵⁷

A comparison of these virtues reveals that although they appear similar, they serve different metaphysical functions. In the *I-Ching*, virtues are *tools for alignment*. In the *Quran*, they are *expressions of submission*. *Ch'ien* (Modesty) and *Cheng* (Sincerity) are described in the *I-Ching* in terms of their efficacy: they bring "good fortune" and "success".³⁸ They are the correct postures to adopt to successfully navigate the currents of the *Tao*. *Khushu'* (Humility) and *Sidq* (Truthfulness), on the other hand, are described in the *Quran* in terms of their relationship to God. They are qualities beloved by God and are prerequisites for divine reward (*Jannah*). Their value is not primarily instrumental for worldly success but is intrinsic to the believer's relationship with God. This situation reveals a contrast between a *virtue ethics of harmony* on the one hand and a *virtue ethics of obedience* on the other. The *I-Ching* teaches one to be humble and sincere because that is how the universe works best. The *Quran* teaches one to be humble and truthful because that is what God commands and loves.

The following table compares the human ideals and core virtues of these two systems.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Human Ideals and Core Virtues

Archetype/Virtue	I-Ching (Jūnzǐ/Shengren)	Quran (Mūmin/Insan-ı Kâmil)	Foundational Rationale
The Ideal Person	<i>Jūnzǐ</i> (Superior Person), <i>Shengren</i> (Sage): A self-cultivated individual who acts effortlessly and correctly in harmony with the cosmic flow.	<i>Mūmin</i> (Believer), <i>Insan-ı Kâmil</i> (Perfect Human): A servant who has completely submitted to Allah, reflects divine morals, and has annihilated his self in Him.	Source of Authority: Autonomous wisdom vs. Theonomic submission.
Humility	<i>Ch'ien</i> (Modesty): A strategic virtue that maintains balance and ensures long-term success. Like the mountain within the	<i>Khushu'</i> : The natural and necessary state of the servant before the majesty of Allah. The opposite of arrogance (<i>kibr</i>), the greatest sin.	Purpose: To achieve cosmic balance vs. To acknowledge servitude to the Creator.

	earth, power is concealed with modesty.		
Truthfulness	<i>Cheng</i> (Sincerity): Fidelity to one's inner nature and the <i>Tao</i> . The absence of artificiality; authenticity.	<i>Sidq</i> : Fidelity to Allah and the prophets. Honesty in word, deed, and intention. A divine command and prophetic quality.	Reference Point: One's own nature/ <i>Tao</i> vs. The absolute truth of God.
Patience/Endurance	Endurance: Persisting through difficult times by understanding the cyclical nature of change. Waiting for the right moment.	<i>Sabr</i> : Showing fortitude in the face of trials from Allah. A form of worship and a sign of faith.	Meaning: Harmony with cosmic rhythm vs. Trust in the divine will.
Right Action	Appropriateness: Action that is balanced, timely, and in harmony with the <i>Tao</i> , as required by the situation.	Salih 'Amal (Righteous Deed): Good and correct deeds that are in accordance with the pleasure of Allah, as specified in the <i>Quran</i> and Sunnah.	Criterion: Situational harmony vs. Revealed law.

Part III: Navigating Life's Path: Fate, Guidance, and Misfortune

Both texts acknowledge that human life is fraught with uncertainty and offer a framework for navigating it. This part will compare the approaches of the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* to fundamental existential issues such as fate, free will, guidance, and misfortune. On one side is a "navigator" who finds his way by reading cosmic patterns; on the other is a "traveler" who proceeds with faith in divine guidance.

Chapter 5: Fate, Freedom, and the Consequences of Action

The question of how free human actions are and how much the course of life is predetermined is central to both traditions. However, their answers to this question differ based on their metaphysical premises.

The I-Ching: Navigating the Patterns of *Ming*

Ming (Destiny/Mandate): The concept of *Ming* (命) in the *I-Ching* does not imply a rigid and unchangeable fatalism.⁶ Rather, it refers to the set of cosmic trends, conditions, and potentials at a given moment. The sage (*Shengren*) does not fight against *Ming*; instead, he seeks to

understand it through divination so that he can act wisely within its parameters. As stated in the "Ten Wings," the goal is to "delight in Heaven and understand fate".¹ Fate is not a prison, but a riverbed within which one moves.

Misfortune as Disharmony: Bad outcomes and misfortune arise from acting against the flow of the *Tao*. Excessive haste, arrogance, ignorance, or ignoring the prevailing conditions makes the individual disharmonious with the universal flow, which naturally leads to negative results.³⁵ Hexagram 29, "The Abysmal" (*K'an*), states that becoming "used to evil" leads one astray from the right path, and "misfortune is the natural result".⁶¹ Misfortune is not an external punishment but an internal consequence of disharmony.

The Quran: Agency under the Decree of Kader

Kader (Divine Decree): According to the *Quran*, Allah's knowledge and will encompass all events, past and future.⁶² However, as modern commentaries, especially that of Muhammad Asad, insistently emphasize, this does not mean a fatalism (*jabr*) that negates human free will and responsibility.⁶² Allah's foreknowledge of something does not mean He compels it. Allah's eternal knowledge is His knowing what the servant will choose with his own free will.

Human Choice and Divine Will: Humans have the freedom of choice (*ikhtiyar*). The principle often expressed in Islamic theology, "The servant wills, Allah creates," summarizes this balance. Responsibility lies not with Allah, who creates the act, but with the human who chooses and wills that act.⁶² According to the *Quran*, Allah leads astray only those who choose to go astray (*fasiqun*).⁶² Therefore, the divine will does not eliminate human free choice but encompasses and realizes it.

Misfortune as Test, Punishment, or Consequence: In the *Quran*, misfortune or affliction has a multi-layered meaning. It can be a *test* to try the believer's faith. It can be a *punishment* for a committed sin. Or it can be a natural *consequence* of straying from the divine path (*dalalah*).⁶⁵ In any case, misfortune is not meaningless or random but has a place within a larger divine plan and framework of justice.

These two systems offer different solutions to the problem of suffering and misfortune. The *I-Ching* offers a *diagnostic tool* to identify disharmony, while the *Quran* offers a *theological framework* for endurance and repentance. When faced with misfortune, the *I-Ching* user consults the oracle to diagnose the nature of the disharmony. The hexagram reveals the nature of the imbalance and suggests a corrective course of action, such as "retreat," "wait," or "be modest." The solution is practical and situational. When faced with misfortune, the believer in the *Quran* is called to show *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in God), and *tawbah* (repentance). The solution is not to change the external situation but to reframe one's internal spiritual state in relation to God. The affliction itself is endowed with a divine purpose, such as a test or purification. Consequently, the *I-Ching* empowers the individual as a navigator of cosmic forces, while the *Quran* empowers the individual through faith in a divine plan that transcends immediate circumstances. One seeks to regain control by understanding the system; the other seeks to find peace by surrendering to the Master of the System.

Chapter 6: The Source of Guidance: Oracle versus Revelation

Humans need guidance to navigate the path of life. The *I-Ching* and the *Quran* both claim to provide this guidance, but the source, nature, and presentation of the guidance are completely different.

The I-Ching: A Manual for Situational Wisdom

The *I-Ching* is essentially a divination manual.² It does not provide universal and absolute laws; instead, it offers guidance tailored to a specific moment and question. It is a "mirror" reflecting the archetypal patterns of a situation.⁶⁸ Its wisdom lies not in prescribing solutions but in enabling one to see the situation from a different perspective and activating one's own intuition.

Discovering the Tao (The Way): The *Tao* is the path to be discovered through observation and intuition, aided by the oracle.¹¹ Each hexagram is a "snapshot" of the ever-changing path, advising on the "path of least resistance".¹⁹ The path is not fixed; it is constantly changing, and the sage's task is to adapt to this change. Guidance is not an external command but an understanding that arises from within and from the situation itself.

The Quran: A Book of Absolute Guidance

The *Quran* is *Wahy* (Revelation); a direct, final, and infallible message from God to humanity.⁴ Its guidance is not situational but universal and timeless. It is not a tool for divination but a source of law (*shari'ah*), ethics (*akhlaq*), and theology (*aqidah*). The *Quran* does not so much tell what to do in a specific situation as it lays down the principles and laws that are valid in all situations.

Following the Sirat al-Mustaqim (The Straight Path): The *Quran* presents a single, clear, and "Straight Path" (*Sirat al-Mustaqim*) to God.⁷¹ This path is Islam itself; the path of all the prophets.⁷³ The prayer repeated by the believer in every prayer, "Guide us to the straight path" (Al-Fatihah 1:6), is a constant plea for steadfastness on this revealed way.⁷³ The path is not a mystery to be discovered but a revealed truth to be followed.

These two concepts of guidance reveal a different understanding of truth itself: *truth as coherence* versus *truth as correspondence*. The guidance of the *I-Ching* is true to the extent that it *coheres* with the cosmic reality of the moment. Its truth is fluid, dynamic, and relative to the situation. An action that is "correct" now may be "incorrect" later. The guidance of the *Quran* is true because it *corresponds* to the eternal and unchanging will of God. Its truth is absolute, fixed, and universal. What is commanded as right is always right, and what is forbidden is always forbidden. This leads to two different modes of engagement. The *I-Ching* requires constant re-interpretation and intuitive application; this develops *adaptability*. The *Quran* requires study, understanding (*fiqh*), and faithful implementation; this develops *fidelity*.

Part IV: The Language of the Cosmos: Symbolism and Eschatology

Both texts use a rich symbolic language to convey their messages and offer a vision of humanity's ultimate destiny. This part will provide a comparative analysis of the core symbols (elements, light/darkness) in the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* and compare their eschatological views regarding the end of time. This analysis will reveal not only what the two texts say, but also how they "see" the world and what they ultimately promise for humanity.

Chapter 7: A Lexicon of Shared Symbols

Symbols are powerful tools that make abstract concepts concrete and understandable. Both the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* draw on universal experiences (natural phenomena, light and darkness) to express deep metaphysical and moral truths.

Elemental Forces

I-Ching: The eight basic trigrams are directly associated with natural phenomena and elements: Heaven (天), Earth (地), Water (水), Fire (火), Wind (風), Thunder (雷), Mountain (山), and Lake (澤).⁸ These are not just physical substances but archetypal forces whose interactions describe the dynamics of a situation. For example, in Hexagram 63 (*After Completion*), Water over Fire symbolizes a state of balance, but also how delicate and transient this balance is.⁷⁸ The interaction of the elements creates a language that describes how situations develop and change.

Quran: In the *Quran*, elements are used as powerful symbols and parables (*amthal*). Water symbolizes life, purification (ablution), and divine revelation (rain).⁸¹ Fire represents divine power (the burning bush of Moses), punishment (Hellfire), and purification (of ores).⁸² The Earth is the stage of human life and a sign of God's provision.⁸¹ The Wind can be a sign of both mercy (bringing rain) and punishment (destroying the people of 'Ad).⁸³ In the *Quran*, elements are almost always used to teach a moral or theological lesson.

Just as the *I Ching*'s Heaven and Earth can be read inwardly (as mind and body), some Islamic interpretations (like Ahmed Hulusi's) read the Quranic 'heavens and earth' as symbols of internal states—with the 'seven heavens' representing seven levels of the self or consciousness, and 'earth' representing the human body or the outer self. Thus, on both the cosmic and personal planes, 'Heaven and Earth' frame existence.

Light and Darkness

I-Ching: Light (*Yang*) and Darkness (*Yin*) are the two fundamental, co-equal, and eternally interacting poles of reality. One is not "good" and the other "evil"; both are necessary for the cosmos to function. The unbroken line is described as "light-giving".¹¹ Hexagram 36, "Darkening of the Light" (*Ming Yi*), does not mean the triumph of evil; it signifies a time when

wisdom requires concealment and patience.⁸⁴ This shows that darkness is also a necessary part of the universal cycle.

Quran: Light (*Nur*) and Darkness (*Zulumat*) represent a moral and spiritual dichotomy. Allah is the "Light of the heavens and the earth" (An-Nur 24:35).⁸⁷ He brings believers from darkness (*zulumat*) into light (*nur*) (Al-Baqarah 2:257). Darkness symbolizes ignorance, disbelief (*kufr*), and straying from the path.⁸⁸ Light, on the other hand, represents faith, guidance, and divine truth. In this dichotomy, light is definitively and absolutely superior to darkness.

A comparison of these symbolic languages reveals that the symbolism of the *I-Ching* is *metaphysical and descriptive*, while that of the *Quran* is *moral and prescriptive*. In the *I-Ching*, the combination of elemental trigrams *describes* the objective state of a situation. The position of Fire over Water is a description of a dynamic, not a judgment. Yin and Yang are neutral principles. In the *Quran*, the use of elemental symbols almost always serves a moral or theological purpose. Water as revelation is a good thing; a destructive wind is a punishment for sin. Light (faith) is the goal to be achieved; Darkness (disbelief) is the state to be avoided. This reflects the fundamental functions of the texts: The *I-Ching* is a system for understanding reality as it is. The *Quran* is a system for transforming reality into what it *ought to be*, according to God's will. The symbols of the *I-Ching* map the world; the symbols of the *Quran* judge it.

The following table provides a comparative summary of the fundamental symbolic language of these two texts.

Table 3: Comparative Lexicon of Key Symbolism

Symbol	I-Ching (Trigrams/Hexagrams)	Quran (Parables/Ayat)	Symbolic Function
Water	<i>K'an</i> (The Abysmal): Danger, depth, fluidity, inner truth.	Life, purification (ablution), revelation (rain), divine mercy.	Descriptive: Defines the dangerous but fluid nature of a situation. vs. Moral: It is the source of life and spiritual cleanliness.
Fire	<i>Li</i> (The Clinging): Brightness, clarity, intelligence, dependence.	Punishment (Hell), divine manifestation (burning bush), purification, light of guidance.	Descriptive: Shows the illuminating and clear aspect of a situation. vs. Moral: It is a symbol of both divine punishment and guidance.
Earth	<i>K'un</i> (The Receptive): Receptivity, submission, nourishment, darkness.	The substance from which man was created, source of sustenance,	Descriptive: Expresses the receptive and foundational nature of

		transience, place of resurrection.	a situation. vs. Theological: Symbolizes man's beginning and end.
Wind/Air	<i>Sun</i> (The Gentle): Penetration, flexibility, following.	Mercy (rain-bringing wind) or punishment (destructive storm).	Descriptive: Shows the penetrating and flexible aspect of a situation. vs. Moral: It is a two-fold manifestation of the divine will (grace/wrath).
Light	<i>Yang</i> Line: The creative, active, bright, masculine principle.	<i>Nur:</i> God Himself, faith, guidance, divine truth.	Metaphysical: One of the two fundamental poles of the universe. vs. Absolute Good: The absolute truth that is the opposite of spiritual darkness.
Darkness	<i>Yin</i> Line: The receptive, passive, dark, feminine principle.	<i>Zulumat:</i> Disbelief (<i>kufr</i>), ignorance, going astray (<i>dalalah</i>).	Metaphysical: The pole necessary for the existence of the universe along with light. vs. Absolute Evil: A spiritual state to be avoided.
Mountain	<i>Ken</i> (Keeping Still): Stillness, stopping, meditation, inner calm.	A proof of God's power and the stability of the earth.	Descriptive: Expresses the static and stable aspect of a situation. vs. Theological: A sign of the Creator's might.
Thunder	<i>Chen</i> (The Arousing): Shock, movement, awakening, beginning.	An indicator of God's power, a warning, or a sign of punishment.	Descriptive: Symbolizes a sudden change and a beginning. vs. Theological: A manifestation of divine power and warning.

Chapter 8: Visions of the End

One of the most defining elements of a worldview is its vision of the ultimate goal of time and history (eschatology). The cyclical time conception of the *I-Ching* and the linear and teleological (purposeful) time conception of the *Quran* create the sharpest contrast on this issue.

The I-Ching: The Eschatology of Endless Cycles

The fundamental principle of the *I-Ching* is perpetual and uninterrupted change. Time is perceived cyclically, like the cycle of the seasons or the alternation of day and night.⁸⁹ In this worldview, there is no concept of a final end to the world, a last judgment, or an ultimate teleological goal for history. The concepts of linear eschatology in Western religions and philosophies are completely foreign to the thought structure of the *I-Ching*.⁹⁰

The system of 64 hexagrams represents a complete set of all possible states of change, but the movement between these states is endless.⁶⁷ The focus is not on a final destination, but on wisely navigating the continuous journey. Every end is the harbinger of a new beginning. Therefore, there is no expectation of an "apocalypse" or "end of the world." Eschatology can be understood at a more micro level, as the completion of a personal or social cycle (e.g., the collapse of one dynasty and the establishment of a new one).

The Quran: The Eschatology of the Final Day

The *Quranic* view of history is linear, progressing from creation to a definitive end. Belief in the Last Day (*Yawm al-Qiyamah*) is one of the fundamental articles of faith in Islam.⁹² This final event is not just the end of a cycle, but the culmination and end of all time and history.

This final event includes the resurrection of the dead, the gathering of all humanity (*hashr*), a final judgment where deeds are weighed on a scale (*mizan*), and then the eternal assignment to Paradise (*Jannah*) or Hell (*Jahannam*).⁹³ The *Quran* and hadith detail the "minor" and "major" signs that will precede this final hour. Major signs such as the appearance of the Dajjal (Antichrist), the second coming of Jesus, and the sun rising from the west are indicators that this final end is approaching.⁹⁶

The presence or absence of a definitive eschatology fundamentally alters the meaning and urgency of human life and moral action. In the cyclical worldview of the *I-Ching*, the purpose of life is to live skillfully and harmoniously *within* the ongoing cycles of change. There is no ultimate deadline or final reckoning. The emphasis is on balance, endurance, and adaptability. In the linear, eschatological worldview of the *Quran*, this worldly life (*dunya*) is a temporary testing ground in preparation for the eternal afterlife (*akhirah*). This imbues every action with ultimate and eternal consequence. The emphasis is on accountability, repentance, and striving for a specific, final reward. In conclusion, the *I-Ching* provides a philosophy for *living well in time*. The *Quran* provides a theology for *transcending time for eternity*. The "Superior Person" masters the art of living within the world's flux. The "Believer" masters the art of preparing for

a world beyond flux.

Conclusion

Synthesis of Findings

This dissertation has undertaken a comparative analysis of the *I-Ching* and the *Quran*, two texts that are radically different in origin and structure. The analysis has revealed that these two texts exhibit both deep structural parallels and fundamental philosophical divergences in their answers to humanity's quest to understand its place in the universe and find the right way to live. The synthesized findings can be summarized around two fundamental models: the *I-Ching's* model of *impersonal process, cyclical time, and harmonious alignment* versus the *Quran's* model of *personal God, linear time, and willed submission*.

The *I-Ching* depicts the universe as a spontaneously operating, impersonal process known as the *Tao*. This process is governed by the eternal dance of *Yin* and *Yang*, and time flows in endless cycles. In this cosmology, the purpose of the human being is to understand the rhythm of this cosmic flow through divination and wisdom and to act in harmony with it. Morality arises from this harmony; misfortune is the natural consequence of disharmony. The ideal human, the *Jūnzǐ*, is an autonomous sage who cultivates himself to achieve this harmony. In contrast, the *Quran* presents the universe as the conscious creation of a personal God with absolute will, Allah. Time is a linear line that progresses from creation to a final day of judgment, the *Qiyamah*. In this theological framework, the purpose of the human being is to believe in and submit to the divine commands revealed through revelation. Morality is obedience to God's will; misfortune can be a test, a punishment, or a divine lesson. The ideal human, the *Mūmin*, is the servant who lives this submission in its purest form and ultimately becomes a reflection of divine morals at the station of *Insan-ı Kâmil*.

The Two Paths Re-examined

The concepts of "The Way" and "The Path" in the title of the thesis capture the essence of these two models. "The Way" (*Tao*) presented by the *I-Ching* is like a wide, flowing river that the wise person learns to navigate by studying its currents and depths. This path requires discovery, intuition, and a constant effort of adaptation. It is not a fixed map, but the art of reading a constantly changing terrain.

"The Path" (*Sirat*) presented by the *Quran* (*Sirat al-Mustaqim*) is like a straight, narrow bridge that the faithful person must cross. This path is illuminated by revelation, its boundaries clearly drawn. To proceed on this path requires not discovery, but fidelity, perseverance, and submission. It is not about exploring a terrain, but about carefully following a given map.

One is a path of discovery, the other a path of fidelity. One seeks wisdom in the immanent order of the universe; the other receives wisdom from the transcendent Creator of the universe. One sees perfection as an autonomous project of self-cultivation; the other defines

perfection as the result of absolute submission.

A final cosmological note: Synchronicity versus Divine Providence. The *I Ching* is often associated with Jung's concept of synchronicity—the idea that internal states and external events can align meaningfully without a direct causal link. In Islam, on the other hand, there is the idea of Divine Providence (*lutf*) and the acceptance of prayers: when a person trusts in Him, events align meaningfully through God's arrangement. A devout person might not use the *I Ching*, but they might perform the *istikhara* prayer and then find an answer in subsequent events arranged by God. Both reflect a trust that life is not random—that there is an unseen order that corresponds to, or at least cares about, the human moral/spiritual state.

Final Reflection

Despite these profound differences, both the *I-Ching* and the *Quran* continue to possess an enduring power and meaning for humanity. Both offer comprehensive, powerful, and highly influential frameworks for finding order, meaning, and purpose in a seemingly chaotic and uncertain universe. They represent two of the most profound answers given to humanity's most fundamental question, independent of time and space: "How, then, shall we live?"

The *I-Ching* offers a guide for those seeking flexibility, harmony, and situational wisdom in a world of inevitable change. It empowers the individual as an active participant in their own life and an interpreter of cosmic forces. The *Quran* offers a refuge for those seeking absolute truth, moral certainty, and ultimate justice. It empowers the individual as part of a divine plan, possessing an eternal purpose beyond the transient life of this world.

In conclusion, the comparison of these two texts is not an effort to prove the superiority of one over the other. On the contrary, it is an effort to display the richness and diversity of humanity's spiritual and philosophical heritage. The *I-Ching* and the *Quran*, like two mountaineers climbing the same peak from different slopes, approach the mystery of existence from different paths. Understanding these paths deepens not only our understanding of these two great traditions but also our own understanding of what it means to be human.

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